FEATURES — NEWS

Helpers Among Us--collecting for Ukrainians

JOYCE WESTNER | STAFF WRITER

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First in a series of articles about residents helping those in need.

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Photos above are Ukrainian children with donated clothes, and BonnieJean Butler

By Joyce Westner Dec. 20, 2023

When Russia invaded Ukraine back in February of 2022, like most Americans, Arlington St. resident BonnieJean Butler was infuriated. "I knew I needed to do something," she says. "They were targeting Ukrainian schools and hospitals!"

Butler already had experience helping needy individuals, having served on the boards of several charities, and also sent more than 3,000 pounds of care packages to US military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan back in 2010. The packages went to soldiers who didn't have support from home. But "I wanted to do more," she says. So in September of 2022 she put the word out on Facebook that she was collecting winter clothes for Ukrainians, and she paid for shipping them. "Things never stopped coming."

Butler says she finds a couple of drop-offs a day on her front porch, and she sorts them, so she can package them appropriately, putting food items in discarded (rodent-proof) cannisters. So far Butler has shipped 18,000 pounds of clothing and other goods, and the items go to one of two non-profits she coordinates with in Ukraine. One is a family distribution center which aids mothers and children, the disabled and elderly, and the other is the Tactical Territory Unit Defenders (aka The Defenders), men a women who support the military and civilian population near th lines.

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Given the lag in getting shipments to Ukraine, there's less need for winter clothes at the moment because they wouldn't arrive until nearly spring, so she's added a Go Fund Me campaign, and accepts donations through Venmo on her website, https://protectglobalchildren.org/. She's also given talks at both the First Congregational Church and at Crawford Memorial Church. The En Ka Society along with the First Congregational Church organized a fur coat drive on her behalf. And she's sent seven food processors over there too.

Right now some of the most pressing needs are for candles and tourniquets, plus she has an Amazon wish list for other items, such as batteries, winter sleeping bags, and baby formula. "The Defenders live in bombed out buildings and they melt the wax down, mix it with cardboard, insert wicks made from cardboard, and make wax-based stoves for cooking, heating small spaces, and light," says Butler.

Friends and Facebook acquaintances sometime come and help her sort the donations. She labels cartons with the contents to satisfy customs requirements, and weighs them. When she gets sixty pounds in cartons, she's ready to ship them out of a place in Norwell, and a volunteer from John's Auto Sales in Somerville drives them down. It costs her $125 for each shipment, and she hopes residents will donate on her website to cover the costs of future shipments. She's applied for a 501(c)(3) non-profit tax status but for anyone wanting to get a tax deduction on their donation now, they can donate through the Crawford Memorial Church instead.

Until a few months ago, Butler worked as a management consultant, including for Kanda Software which stopped doing business with Russia when the war started. "And they're offering a 20% discount for clients willing to use Ukrainian consultants."

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But now her charitable works take up all of her time, and she sees no end in sight. The Ukrainian groups have given her two awards for her humanitarian efforts. “But it’s not just me,” she says. “The people of Winchester who are donating deserve a tremendous amount of credit for helping those suffering in the war.”

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Well, Winchester, we made it through the weekend with only a coating of snow that amounted to nothing on Sunday afternoon. But during the Feb. 22-23 blizzard, Winchester News once again asked residents to send their snow photos. And here is what we received! Solmaz Amirnazmi said her daughters and

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Winchester Community Music School set to expand, upgrade

The big events in Winchester Community Music School always take place in Nichols Performance Hall. With the school and its performances' growing in popularity, the hall and many of its amenities are due for an upgrade. The performance hall is one of the main areas that the school seeks to

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Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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